Philosophy Department

Kalamazoo College
1200 Academy St. Kalamazoo, MI 49006

PHI 540

Philosophy and Literature: The Possibility of Romantic Love

Winter 1998

12:40 - 2:30 pm TR

Professor Ted Toadvine

203 Humphrey House

Course Description

In recent years, the very possibility of romantic love as traditionally conceived has come under attack from philosophical and psychoanalytic perspectives. Further, feminist critics have argued that, even if such love is possible, it is to be rejected as an oppressive patriarchal institution. At an even deeper level, the crisis of romantic love seems tied to a more profound crisis of meaning in contemporary western society: after our confidence in religious and cultural institutions and conventions has faltered, is a meaningful human existence still possible, or are our lives?and loves?condemned to pathology or absurdity? These topics will be approached in this class through a consideration of contemporary philosophical writings and recent novels which grapple with the very possibility of love in the contemporary world. Unlike classes which seek primarily to convey information, this class will be primarily oriented toward our own philosophical examination and evaluation of the nature of romantic love. Toward this end, it will be necessary for class discussions and writings to integrate personal experiences and philosophical reflections with the contributions of both philosophical and literary works. Ultimately, this task will raise questions about the relation between philosophy and literature, to what extent the two can be distinguished, and the relative usefulness and contribution of each to the reflective process.

Requirements

- 25% 5 quizzes (5% each)
- 30% journal
- 25% final term paper
- 20% participation

Quizzes will cover material from readings and class discussions. Students will be expected to keep a journal that includes reflections on the course topics and responses to questions distributed in class. Journals will be collected several times over the course of the quarter. Journal entries will not be individually graded, but must
be completed. The final term paper will be a 10-12 page essay addressing a question distributed in class. Final papers are due on the date set for the final examination. Attendance, preparation for class, and participation in discussions are expected. Three unexcused absences will result in a full grade reduction.

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Texts

- Reading Packet including:
  - Ernest S. Burch, Jr., "Marriage and Divorce Among the North Alaskan Eskimos."
  - Sigmund Freud, *Collected Papers IV*, pp. 192-235
  - Joseph Glenmullen, "The Woman who Thought Her Orgasm was a Gift."
  - Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, pp. 126-155
  - Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 364-412

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Reading Schedule

**WEEK 1:**
Course Mechanics

*Biological and Anthropological Critiques*
- Desmond Morris (packet)
- Ernest S. Burch, Jr. (Packet)

**WEEK 2:**
*Psychoanalytic and Sociological Critiques*
- Freud (Packet)
- Glenmullen (Packet)
- McMurtry (Packet)

**WEEK 3:**
*Feminist and Existential Critiques*
- Firestone (Packet)
- Sartre (Packet)

*Love: Emotion, Myth and Metaphor*, vii-xxxv

**WEEK 4:**
*Impossible Vacation*, 1-91.

**WEEK 5:**
*Impossible Vacation*, 91-228.

**WEEK 6:**
*The Shrine at Altamira*, 1-123.
WEEK 7:
The Shrine at Altamira, 127-261.
Love: Emotion, Myth and Metaphor, 93-121.

WEEK 8:
The End of the Road, 1-100.

WEEK 9:
The End of the Road, 101-188.

WEEK 10: